

Imagine living in a world where your ideas are the opposite of everyone else's. There is no alone time since you cannot be alone. You hope to do what you choose, but instead, your society chooses for you. Besides, your identity does not exist because you have no personal time in which to develop it. This is the case for the protagonist of Ayn Rand's *Anthem*, Equality 7-2521. He wanted to be a Scholar, but the Council of Vocations designated him as a Street Sweeper as he sought too much when he was younger. Undoubtedly, Equality spent his life seeking more knowledge, even if the Council punished him for it. Equality and his society are opposites, as he is an individualist, and they are collectivist.

In *Anthem*'s society, individuality is the greatest sin. Nobody has the time or the ability to have their own identity because the government dictates every second. They forbid anyone to spend time alone, as it is 'selfish' and 'not helpful' towards the group. There are no self-identities because they assign everyone a generic name at birth. Also, people cannot have their preferences because of the transgression of choice, which is "to love any among men better than any others, since [they] must love all men and all men are [their] friends." (Rand 30) If one committed the transgression, it would imply that one thought about their preferences. Words are also transgressions, as some of them suggest individualism. For example, saying the word 'ego' or 'I' would lead to death. Therefore, the individual has a disability and is disregarded in *Anthem*'s society.

Conversely, the people hold collectivism in high regard. Collectivism is when the group's effort is above the individual's. On the Palace of World Council's walls, it reads, "We are one and all in one. There is no man but only the WE, One, indivisible, and forever." (Rand 19) These lines repeat when one feels a weak link to the group or a sense of individuality. Another chant is

for bedtime, “We are nothing. Mankind is all by the grace of our brothers [that allow] our lives. We exist through, by, and for our brothers who are the state. Amen.” (Rand 21) These show that the greater good is superior to everything else. Since collectivism is sacred to the people, they recognize it as the moral default and those who do not believe so follow with fear.

The protagonist, Equality, softly complies with society’s ideas of individualism and collectivism in the beginning. In the first line of the novella, he said that “[it was] a sin to write [in his journal].” (Rand 17) Equality also regrets his gifted brain because it makes him different from everyone else. He still feels that collectivism wrongs him by stifling his curiosity. Equality still pursues to figure out himself via discovery in an abandoned cave. Before Equality ran away, he found himself with a recent friend, a light bulb, and an ever-growing sense of individuality. He left for the Uncharted Forest because he wanted to discover the unknown and avoid the Council of Scholars’ potential punishment for the light bulb.

In the end, Equality discovered himself with the Golden One, his friend, in the Uncharted Forest. There, he finds the unmentionable word, ‘I.’ Equality also realizes that his treasures, “[his] thought, [his] will, [and his] freedom.” (Rand 96) With these treasures, Equality and the Golden One now believe in the power of choice. Equality now understood that his ‘curse,’ his quick ability to learn, was a gift. It was “the best in [him] had been his sins and [his] transgressions.” (Rand 98) Equality was now free to live his life without the collective.

If Equality lived in the United States (US), then he would fit well. American society is individualistic, as it prioritizes self-representation over the group. People in the US “define themselves as separate from the group and as autonomous.” (Rosenbaum) Since people separate themselves, they form their identities. However, some social cues and behavior are

‘inappropriate,’ limiting how one can live one life. Equality would be unhappy if he felt that signals alter his thoughts, will, or freedom. But Equality still would fit better in the United States and not his society, where individuality is the greatest sin.

Equality and his society oppose each other’s ideas, as he is an individualist, and his community is collectivist. His society sees collectivism as sacred and individualism as sinful. Anything to do with an individual is taboo because the more significant benefit is the most important thing. Individual thought impedes this goal, making it harder to reach collective goals. Meanwhile, Equality views individualism in a positive light because it allows him to express himself. He hates collectivism, as it discourages independent thinking. Also, Equality would be happier if they lived in the United States. There is an emphasis on individuality, which suits Equality’s wants, but some norms would annoy him. To conclude, the world can offer what you do not want, just like in Equality’s world.